

# USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service East National Technology Support Center

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## DIRECTOR'S COLUMN

FY2012 1st QTR

The [East National Technology Support Center](#) continues to do great work, and I'm glad to be part of this team again! Although I was away for an entire year it never seemed like I left. Our Center has initiated several new endeavors and continued other projects that position us to be a trusted leader for helping States get conservation on the ground. Our webinar program enjoys outstanding success and is reaching employees throughout the country. We estimate 350 participants tuned in during one such event! ...That is no-travel training that really pays.



It has now been a little more than a year since the [National Plant Data Team](#) joined us here in Greensboro. Dr. Gerry Moore and his team of botanists have begun to make significant changes to the [PLANTS database](#) and are constantly improving its web interface and products. This Team is a valuable resource, and PLANTS continues to be one of the most visited sites USDA offers.

The campus where our Center is located continues to expand with the recent opening of the Joint School of Nanoscience and Nanoengineering. The research they conduct will hopefully have implications that will one day assist with the conservation of natural resources. I encourage you to visit our office and take a look at the many things that are going on here to promote conservation of natural resources to "help people help the land!"

In this, our first electronic newsletter, read more about the newly renamed Soil Health and Sustainability Team, [@USDA\\_NRCS\\_ENTSC](#) on Twitter, regionalization of conservation practice standards, CDSI delivery in the East Region, and our assistance with the development of ecological site descriptions.

**Elvis Graves**  
**Acting Director**

## HEALTHY SOIL FOR LIFE!

Did you know that the terms soil health and soil quality are often used interchangeably with farmers more readily relating to soil health and scientists generally preferring soil quality? It's simple really... Just like your own energy, productivity, and resistance to illness are based on your overall health, farmers can relate the productivity of their land and its ease of management to having healthy soil.



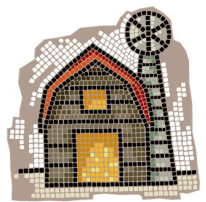
Our soil health/soil quality staff recently changed its team name to [National Soil Health and Sustainability Team](#) to better reflect its role in helping farmers build healthy soil. The Team interacts with state, area, and field office staff, partners, and farmers to promote its vision of "Healthy Soil for Life!" The updated name results from changes that took place about a year ago when NRCS's work related to soil health/soil quality technology transfer and training was assigned to staff located at the East National Technology Support Center.

The National Soil Health and Sustainability Team has since developed a 2011-2015 Strategic Plan and a Plan of Work to guide its daily activities, which includes development of [soil health videos](#), how-to documents, Centers of Sustainability model farms, no-travel soil health training, and more. Team members met with Chief White to demonstrate effects of soil health practices on soil stability and presented a summary of planned activities to state conservationists to offer their assistance. Team members continue to coordinate and instruct "Soil Health and Sustainability for Field Staff" training offered as a 2.5-day course by NRCS's National Employee Development Center.

*Photo: Ray Archuleta, conservation agronomist, demonstrates soil slaking... or NOT!*

## REGIONALIZATION OF PRACTICE STANDARDS

Conservation practice standards are the primary vehicle that NRCS uses to deliver technology to our clients. When Chief Dave White initiated the 90% solution to address the challenge to deliver our services with a reduced workforce, it was only natural that conservation practice standards would be part of the solution.



[Bill Reck](#), environmental engineer, [Anthony Burns](#), national technology specialist, and Phil McLoud, agricultural engineer (since retired) represent the East NTSC on the Nationalizing Conservation Practice Documents team. The team has been charged with developing a process and recommendations to address the state level burden of maintaining conservation practice standards, specifications, job sheets, and associated documents. The goal of the team is to investigate potential methods of changing the way NRCS revises national conservation practices and associated documents, while still retaining the necessary flexibility for states to customize the requirements of conservation practice application and meet state and local laws and regulations.

With a goal to have 90% of the workforce working directly with landowners on a daily basis, assistance that alleviates the workload on state and field office staff to review, revise or develop practice standards and their supporting documents are potential winners for everyone. This effort also compliments NRCS's ongoing Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative efforts. The team's work on the Chief's 90% solution will continue over the course of this year.

## CDSI READINESS ROLL-OUT

The Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative (CDSI) has three broad objectives: 1) Simplify Conservation Delivery, 2) Streamline Business Processes, and 3) Ensure Science-based Assistance.

The role of the East NTSC is captured in item 3 with the focus on "delivery of technically-sound products and services." The East NTSC is involved in developing the Conservation Practice Overview Sheets, Practice Implementation Sheets (jobsheets), and Resource Concern Information Sheets, all of which are products that will support Resource Inventory - Analysis and Formulating Alternatives in the conservation planning process.

The concept is to develop as many of the support documents as possible at the national level, but there will be gaps or special needs that the states will need to address. In the 2nd Quarter, the East NTSC will begin rolling out training to help states prepare for the implementation of the CDSI Conservation Desktop in FY 2013.

[Anthony Burns](#), national technology specialist, is serving as our lead contact if you have questions.

## EAST REGION ECOLOGICAL SITE DESCRIPTIONS

Ecological Site Descriptions (ESDs) are land classes that are based on the relationships of vegetation dynamics to soil, geomorphology, and climate. An ecological site is a distinctive kind of land with specific physical characteristics that differs from other kinds of land in its ability to produce a distinctive kind and amount of vegetation. Soil Survey information and ESDs provide a foundation for conservation planning on forestland, rangeland, and pastureland. ESDs also support resource management for issues such as wildlife habitat, water quality and quantity, and carbon sequestration. ESDs are a powerful tool for determining the present condition of resources in a geographic area and projecting the effects of management either forward or backward in time.



NRCS has a long history of developing ESDs in cooperation with several partner agencies and NGOs. Until recently, however, most ESDs have been developed west of the Mississippi River and on rangeland. [Tom Ward](#), forester, [Michael Hall](#), grazing lands specialist, [Kevin Ogles](#), grazing lands specialist, and [Steve Woodruff](#), agronomist, provide leadership at our Center to accelerate ESD development in the East Region. Workshops on how to begin developing ESDs have been held with State Office ecological sciences and soils staffs in Georgia, North Carolina, West Virginia, and South Carolina.

An ESD for the southern most end of MLRA 153A has undergone the peer review process and is ready for final edits and approval. Later this year, similar 2-day workshops will be held in Pennsylvania-Rhode Island-Connecticut, Kentucky, and Arkansas-Mississippi. The East NTSC ESD team is assisted by Mike Kucera, agronomist and Craig Buskohl, forester of the Soil Quality and Ecosystems Branch located at the National Soil Survey Center in Lincoln, NE. Ecological Site Inventory Specialists at MLRA Soil Survey Offices in Raleigh, NC (Michelle Clendenin) and Amherst, MA (David Clausnitzer) have also assisted with the East Region ESD workshops.

*Photo: Tom Ward, forester, collects site data.*

## JOIN US! OUR WEBINAR SCHEDULE ... is GROWING

### Date & Topic

- [02/29](#) - [Join Info: Essential Principles for Conservation Planning on Pastures](#)
- 03/28 - Nutrient Management in No-till Cropping Systems
- 04/10 - Organic Pasture Management
- 04/25 - Common Bees and Best Bee Plants of the East
- 05/30 - Sensor-based Irrigation Water Management - Scheduling
- 06/10 - Food Safety & Conservation
- 06/27 - Management of Manure Nutrients
- 07/25 - River Science for Non-engineers
- 08/14 - Establishing & Maintaining Habitat for Pollinators & Beneficials
- 08/29 - Design of Silage Leachate Collection and Treatment Systems
- 09/26 - Using the Leaching Index in RUSLE2 for Nutrient Management
- 10/09 - Organic No-Till Systems
- 10/31 - Tree/Shrub Suitability Groups: Matching Woody Plants to Soils
- 11/28 - Manure to Energy: Thermal conversion of Animal Manures & Biomass

[Join our Webinar Announcement List.](#)

We also have mini-series for grazing lands, soil-plant-water interactions, and feed management planned. More information coming soon. Audio and video join information is released approximately 2-3 weeks prior to an event.

## ASSISTANCE HIGHLIGHTS

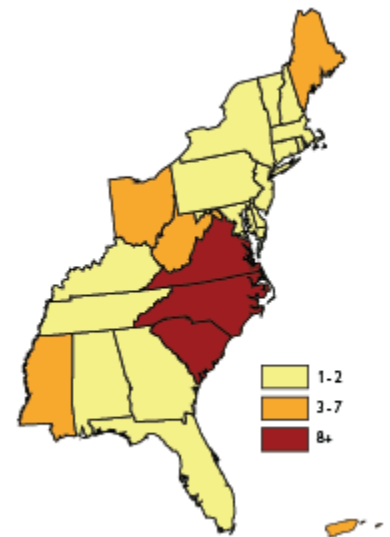
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### Technical Assistance Delivery

In the first quarter of FY2012, the Center provided assistance on 85 requests, of which 62 were direct assistance to states, six were regional, and 17 were national activities. In addition to direct assistance to the states, the Center supported 26 training events to a combined audience of more than 1,600 participants. Assistance by state is shown in the East Region Service Area map.

Visit the [Science and Technology Training Library](#) (employee intranet) for training materials, Webinar replays, and to view the Webinar Calendar. Contact [Holli Kuykendall](#), ecologist, for more information.



## EMPLOYEE NEWS

### Kristin Smith heads home to Mississippi

Kristin Smith, ecologist (environmental compliance), accepted a position with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Biloxi, Mississippi. She will serve as the State Liaison for the Coastal Impact Assistance Program. This program provides grant funding for Outer Continental Shelf oil and gas producing states for the conservation, protection and preservation of coastal areas. Kristin will be working with the MS Dept. of Marine Resources and local governments to facilitate the implementation of their projects. Kristin and family have already headed south to Mississippi. While this change in employment will provide a new and challenging professional experience for Kristin, her move is primarily for personal reasons. Both Kristin and husband Robert grew up in Mississippi, so they are moving "home." Hank Henry, wildlife biologist, and Kale Gullett, fisheries biologist, are filling in for Kristin until further notice.

### Phil McCloud heads to Hawaii... Sweet!

Phil McCloud, agricultural engineer, retired at the end of December. Phil went into retirement with a bang and dedication to making his final days of his career as productive as any other he had... and if you know Phil, you know that all of his days were productive ones. Phil will be missed, but we've already enjoyed his company for the occasional lunch and are fortunate that wife Susan, retired from our Center in 2007, has accompanied him several times. At press time, Phil and Susan are on the "Big Island" celebrating his retirement. In fact, from Hawaii Phil tells us... [Another](#)

*warm sunny day... We went on a snorkeling cruise yesterday... Saw spinner dolphins and humpback whales from the boat... Moving on to a new hotel today... Going up on the volcano tomorrow.*

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